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Involving Faculty with Student Affairs: Some Personal Pointers

Frank P. Ardaiole

Involving faculty with student affairs has become increasingly critical in recent years; this article presents personal pointers for the student affairs practitioner to follow to foster these relationships.

For the past decade, many student affairs practitioners have accepted the necessity of involving their students in the many processes of their institutions as a meaningful way to foster student development (Astin, 1984; Study Group, 1984). Another underlying philosophical assumption is that most practitioners embrace the 1987 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' *A Perspective on Student Affairs*, that states:

Colleges and universities organize their primary activities around the academic experience: curriculum, library, classroom and the laboratories. The work of student affairs cannot substitute for that academic experience. As a partner in the educational enterprise, student affairs enhances and supports the academic mission. (NASPA, pp. 9-10)

The problem, however, is how does the student affairs practitioner become a true partner with academic affairs in the educational enterprise? Involving faculty will promote the student affairs' goal of involving students in their education. While in recent years much has been written on successful partnerships and practices peculiar to specific institutions and functions (Eickman, 1988; Nutter & Hurst, 1988; Schroeder, DiTiberio, & Kalsbeck, 1988; Stringer, Steckler, & Johnson, 1988), the purpose of this article is to provide some personal pointers gleaned from experience that will serve any student affairs practitioner who is dedicated to involving faculty with student affairs. It will describe tactics for involving faculty in student affairs that eventually lead to meaningful involvement of student affairs practitioners in the total decision-making processes at postsecondary institutions. These tactics, at the minimum, will result in the direct interaction with faculty and allow the student affairs practitioner to be around academic colleagues and play at least the role of second among equals!

Given the philosophical roots of student affairs and the current state of affairs

on many campuses caused by faltering national and state economies, the need to be at the table where and when decisions are made is paramount. Recent publications include reports of student services budget cuts to protect academic programs (Cage, 1992) and an essay (Lazerson & Wagener, 1992) that calls for faculty to reassume roles for providing academic and other student services. These are omens of ill fortune that can only worsen the lament of many student affairs practitioners who often experience the lack of cooperation and mutual respect from academic (and other) colleagues on campus. Simply stated, the restructuring currently underway at many institutions can do serious harm to the relationships between academic and student affairs unless faculty and student affairs professionals respect each other by being mutually involved. No matter what campus circumstances are, if any student affairs position does not contribute to the academic mission of the institution, then the position is either on the periphery of what is vital as a low-level service provider, or the position is ripe for elimination.

From a practitioner's viewpoint, two approaches generally work for successfully involving faculty with student affairs and building involving relationships with academic affairs:

1. Structural approaches exist when there are clear lines of responsibility and authority for student affairs professionals to perform functions considered academic, especially those borderline functions which could be in either area depending on a campus's unique historical culture or current state of political affairs (e.g., admissions, academic advising, registration, learning support, orientation, bookstore, enrollment management, and retention).

2. Personal approaches seek out opportunities for an entree into building relationships with academic affairs usually through issues or controversies.

Through the course of a career, it is not uncommon to experience the full continuum of involved relationships and responsibilities with academic and student affairs. From personal experiences, one end of the continuum can be full involvement and responsibility at one institution for all things academic that affect students, such as scholastic standards administration (Ardaiole, 1989). This can be contrasted by involvement at another institution that represents the other extreme of the continuum: being the first student affairs professional to have a doctoral degree in higher education administration with no initial responsibilities of an academic nature. The faculty were primarily concerned with how this new vice president for student affairs would get students into or out of the student union across a busy street.

Arenas for Building Relationships

Building involving relationships with faculty and academic affairs calls for an understanding of the various arenas where collaboration occurs. Arenas are more than places for physical interactions; they include current issues and trends around which much interaction between academic and student affairs has and will occur in postsecondary institutions. Smith (1988) outlined the following first

five:

1. Enhancing quality of the undergraduate educational experience and necessary conditions and means for improvement.
2. Managing enrollment, especially retention, given national student demographics for the next few years.
3. Dealing with diversity issues on campus.
4. Assessment of student outcomes.
5. Scholarship on intellectual growth as it relates to affective domains and values formation in students.

In addition, the author adds the following:

6. Compliance and accountability with new laws and evolving standards of practice, for example, the Americans with Disabilities Act, individual state accountability legislation, mandated sexual harassment procedures, Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act, academic due process, community service, and the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, and so forth.
7. Computerization and the crossover technology that will provide enhanced teaching and service opportunities for students.
8. Adaptations of the total quality management movement with its emphasis on continuous improvement that will benefit student affairs practitioners who can be translators of its dictates in educational and instructional environments.

Building Involving Relationships

Brown (1990) calls for activities that foster collaboration and partnership with academic affairs. Whether the student affairs practitioner is working within preexisting structures or is working personally to fulfill the centrality of the academic experience for students, certain actions are necessary to build involving relationships with faculty. The following pointers are offered which foster involvement and true academic and student affairs collaboration:

- Seek substantial knowledge of all available arenas through continuing educational growth achieved by reading, attending seminars and workshops, or seeking out other knowledge-enhancing opportunities.
- Pursue involvement in the governance structure of the institution. If this is not already a component of a particular position, attend governance meetings as an interested observer and volunteer for committee or task force positions. Create a governance or advisory group for one's student affairs responsibilities that will link and vest faculty in discharging such responsibilities to students.
- Solicit an instructional academic appointment and volunteer to teach when an opportunity presents itself. Freshmen orientation seminars, peer advising courses, and career development seminars are all particularly fruitful endeavors.
- Always display understanding and live the academic mission of the institution in all administrative, service, and program activities. Be a substantive scholar in one area of expertise by presenting at professional meetings and conducting research with the goal of publication. Conduct and publish research on student attrition, retention, satisfaction, and outcomes. Be a scholar-

practitioner. Inform faculty regarding the scholarly achievements of student development professionals.

- Always present the primary focus of student affairs as the caring for and nurturing of students. It is an agenda with which few can take exception.
- Be process and community builders in time of campus turmoil. Seek opportunities that bridge interactions between faculty, top administrators, and students.
- Help faculty in matching the content of learning with the process of learning and the variance brought by different students.
- Be political in a positive way by knowing where the decisions that affect students are made and working to influence them. Demand and earn (through hard work characterized by integrity) political parity with peers.
- Develop opportunities for student affairs staff to interact with faculty by creating faculty advisory boards for all student affairs functions.
- Learn and truly appreciate the academic mission of the institution and the uniqueness of faculty through staff development opportunities. Take every opportunity to develop personal relationships with faculty members and discover their perspectives on roles within postsecondary institutions.
- Volunteer to be on any and all academic and institution-wide committees or demand representation. Attend to all committee assignments in an exemplary manner and become vital to their success.
- Create organizational goals for student affairs that affect the academic mission for which staffs are held accountable (e.g., retention, cooperative programming with faculty, research on student needs).

Conclusion

The arenas and the pointers presented above, practiced in a consistent and sustained way, have proven valuable in building relationships between academic affairs and student affairs that eventually lead to meaningful involvement of student affairs practitioners in the total decision-making processes at postsecondary institutions. From these relationships, true partnerships that ultimately benefit students can emerge. However, one caveat is important to note, no matter whether the structural linkage already exists or personal approaches are being used to create a relationship: if you get comfortable, get careful. There are always new actors coming on the scene who question assumptions and approaches. The wise student affairs practitioner must always be aware of the changing environment or changing conditions will move the student affairs professional peripheral to the central academic mission. Above all, be an educator first, and second, work to be an integrator (Garland, 1985) of the goals of students, faculty, and administrators.

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